

**Remarks for Mayor Paul D. Fraim
Tide Ribbon Cutting Ceremony
MacArthur Station
August 18, 2011
at 5:30 pm**

Good evening. Thank you for joining us.

On behalf of the City Council and the citizens of Norfolk, I am pleased to welcome each of you to the ribbon cutting for The Tide light rail system, an historic moment by any measure.

What started as a vision 20 years ago, now becomes a reality as we board The Tide and ride the Commonwealth's first light rail train.

Dreams do not fulfill themselves. They take the constant and dedicated effort of believers. And that's what occurred here.

We are honored to have so many people with us now to help celebrate this occasion, and that includes many believers whose hard work and commitment helped make The Tide possible. Everyone here has been important to the project in some way, but I want to take just a minute to first recognize our platform guests and just a few others. First is

- 3rd District Congressman Bobby Scott.
- Deputy Federal Transit Administrator Thereese MacMillan. Ms. MacMillan, I know you've come down from Washington for this . . . we are honored you could join us. Give our best to your boss, Peter Rogoff, who has been our strong patron through this.
- VDOT Commissioner Greg Whirley
- Former 2nd District Congresswoman and now director of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation, Thelma Drake – my new hero.
- Dr. Patricia Woodbury, chair of the Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads who is joined by her fellow HRT board members.
- Norfolk City Councilman Paul Riddick, immediate past chair of the Transportation District Commission of Hampton Roads.
- Phil Shucet, president and CEO of Hampton Roads Transit.
- Also with us from the Norfolk City Council are:

Vice Mayor Anthony Burfoot
Tommy Smigiel

Dr. Terry Whibley
Angelia Williams and
Barclay Winn, who also serves on the HRT board.

And, also with us today are City Manager Marcus Jones and
City Attorney Bernard Pishko

- We also have Senator Yvonne Miller, chair of the Virginia General Assembly's Senate Transportation Committee.
- Delegate Joe May, chair of the Virginia General Assembly's House Transportation Committee.
- Also – Senator Fred Quayle, Sen. Frank Wagner, Sen. Ralph Northam, Del. Chris Jones, Del. Glenn Oder, Del. Chris Stolle, Del Algie Howell, and Del. Lynwood Lewis. And, Aubrey Layne, Hollis Ellis and Shep Miller.
- And former members of Norfolk City Council – Don Williams, Alveta Green, Daun Hester, Sabine Andrews and Mrs. Mason Andrews, and former mayors Irvine Hill and Joe Leafe.
- Also with us are members of the Hampton Roads delegation of the Virginia General Assembly, members of the Commonwealth Transportation Board, other federal and state transportation officials, city managers from our sister jurisdictions in South Hampton Roads, and city and HRT staff who have worked so hard on the project. All have contributed in numerous and important ways to the planning, construction and, now operation of light rail and I would ask you to join me in recognizing their efforts.
- Others recognized: Treasurer Tom Moss, Greg Underwood (Commonwealth Attorney), Sharon McDonald (Commissioner of Revenue), NSU President, Tony Atwater, John Keifer, Stanley Stein, Ray Gindroz, EVMS President Harry Lester, RADM Boensel, RADM Mehling (USCG), and Capt Chuck Melcher

It is also appropriate to recognize someone else who played a vital role in bringing light rail to us, and that is former Norfolk City Council member and former board member and chair of Hampton Roads Transit, Randy Wright. From studies and planning, to support and funding, no one worked harder than Randy on this project, and so I ask you to join me in recognizing his hard work and dedication to the vision.

Thank you, Randy.

As The Tide opens to the public a new era in mass transit will begin for Norfolk, for Hampton Roads and for the Commonwealth. Always envisioned as a regional system,

Norfolk's light rail is but the first leg of what can become an integrated rail network that will move large numbers of people efficiently to and from home and work.

Major metropolitan areas all across the country have pursued light rail, and we are, in fact, the smallest city in the country to achieve this goal. All of the good that can be accomplished by closely lacing the region together with the light rail system – the congestion relief, economic development opportunities, environmental and quality of life improvements – have made this effort more than worthwhile.

When all is said and done, and all the bills paid, it is important to realize that The Tide is one of the least expensive light rail systems built on a per mile basis.

Special thanks go to HRT president and CEO, Phil Shucet, who led the effort to complete construction of The Tide and shaved nearly \$20 million off the estimated cost of the project – a great achievement. Thank you for the leadership you brought to the project, Phil.

It's been said that a community's economic destiny is determined by its transportation network. We have worked hard to expand on economy and on tax base so we can ease the tax burden on our citizens and businesses. And we have been succeeding.

Since 2003, the City's assessed real estate value has grown from \$9.3 billion to about \$18 billion today – nearly doubling in seven years. Quite an accomplishment when you consider the recession and understand much of the added value came through redevelopment.

But without an adequate transportation system, our accomplishments are at risk and so are those of our sister jurisdictions. Consider this – at last count there are approximately 223,500 jobs in the city – military and civilian. But more than 111,000 of those jobs are filled by commuters who drive into Norfolk from all across the region and then return home at the end of the work day, half of the work force. Thousands more drive to our universities, commercial, retail and civic attractions. They all add tremendously to our economy.

Over 82% of Hampton Roads residents drive alone to work, up from nearly 73% in 1990 – many of them bound for Norfolk – including over 60,000 Virginia Beach residents. As a result, out of 35 comparable metropolitan regions across the country our peak hour travel time is fourth worst – at the busiest hour of the week it is second worst. Because of this congestion, commuters are finding it increasingly difficult to get to work or class on time. For some it has become a roll of the dice.

Here is the point - if we allow this trend to continue, if people can't get to their jobs, the jobs will go to the people somewhere outside of Norfolk – and probably outside of the region - at a devastating economic impact to this community. This problem is compounded by the fact that Norfolk is the most infrastructure dependent city in the Commonwealth, with costly tunnels and bridges being our main gateways.

This is why we must concentrate so much on road and transit improvements. Today, we are cutting the ribbon on a 7.4 mile light rail system that is predicted to carry thousands of riders daily. With this system we hope to move a portion of these “drive alone” commuters out of their cars and into our city thereby easing congestion and travel time.

It is also a fact that the decision to bring inter-city passenger rail to South Hampton Roads at Harbor Park was influenced by its intersection with light rail at that location. The region has unanimously endorsed the Southside corridor for high-speed rail. Both of these systems will operate out of downtown Norfolk.

Thanks to the General Assembly and to Thelma Drake, State funding will allow for improvements to accommodate a commuter train using Norfolk Southern track. This means we will have round-trip passenger rail operating from here to Richmond, Washington, New York and Boston in less than two years.

We expect light rail and inter-city rail to be a game changer for Norfolk, and secure our historic position as the business and financial hub of a growing region with 1.6 million people.

Again, on behalf of the City Council and the citizens of this great city I thank all of you for your assistance in making light rail become a reality for Norfolk, the region and the Commonwealth.

Light rail is an investment in our economy, in our quality of life and in our environment. It is an investment in our future and our children's future.

It is now my pleasure to invite my good friend Congressman Bobby Scott to the podium. He will be followed by our other speakers. Bobby . . .

Congressman Scott
Therese MacMillan
VDOT Commissioner Greg Whirley
Thelma Drake
Dr. Pat Woodbury
Councilman Paul Riddick
Philip Shucet

To conclude the ceremony, let me invite our speakers, members of City Council, Senator Miller and Delegate May to join me on the platform for the ribbon cutting.

Following the ribbon cutting you are all invited to board The Tide for a ceremonial ride to Monticello Station where we will debark for a reception at the Wells Fargo Center.

The Tide is in. Let's ride.